

SAFEGUARDING POLICY [GOV03]

Statement

ACOLA is committed to ensuring that all people who interact with the organisation, including employees, Board members, committee members, volunteers, contractors and participants, are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

ACOLA affirms that every person, regardless of their age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or family or social background, has equal rights to protection from harm.

This Policy reflects ACOLA's values of integrity, transparency and inclusiveness, and its commitment to maintaining a safe, respectful and supportive environment for everyone connected with its work.

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following Policies:

- Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure [GOV04]
- Child Safety Policy [GOV02]
- Code of Conduct [HR01]
- Privacy Policy [GOV05]
- Whistleblower Policy [GOV06]
- Respectful Conduct and Behaviours Policy [HR02]
- Equal Employment Opportunity Policy [HR03]
- Workplace Health and Safety Policy [HR05]

Scope

This Policy applies to ACOLA Board members, committee members, employees, volunteers, expert/reference group and steering committee members, contractors, and all individuals participating in ACOLA business and activities, both at ACOLA premises and at any other location.

This Policy applies to conduct that occurs in connection with ACOLA and its activities whether it occurs during work-related activities and events, outside the workplace or working hours, or via social media, email, or other manner of interaction.

Definitions

Abuse means any act or omission that causes harm to a person, including physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological abuse, financial exploitation or neglect.

Neglect means the failure to provide a person with the basic care, supervision or support they need, resulting in harm or risk of harm.

Exploitation means taking unfair advantage of a person's vulnerability, including financial exploitation, coercion or misuse of a position of trust or authority.

Safeguarding means the measures taken to protect the health, wellbeing, and human rights of individuals, enabling them to live free from abuse, harm and neglect.

Safeguarding concern means any concern, allegation, or report that a person connected with ACOLA has been, or is at risk of being, subjected to abuse, neglect, or exploitation in connection with ACOLA's activities, personnel, events or funded partners.

Vulnerable person means any person who, due to age, disability, illness, or other circumstances, may be at greater risk of harm or less able to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Responsible Person has the meaning given in the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cth).

Expectations

All individuals involved with or representing ACOLA in any capacity are expected to:

- treat every person connected with ACOLA with dignity, respect, and fairness and prioritise their safety and wellbeing,
- be mindful of and proactively uphold ACOLA's commitment to equal protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation regardless of a person's age, gender, race, religious beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or family or social background,
- maintain appropriate professional boundaries in all interactions connected with ACOLA,
- recognise and respond appropriately to signs of abuse, neglect or exploitation,
- speak up when they see, know of, or can anticipate the likelihood of a safeguarding concern,
- intervene in a way comfortable for themselves and if they feel safe to do so, to redirect or stop behaviour that may cause harm,
- ensure any person affected by a safeguarding concern is safe, check on them if appropriate and understand if and how they may like to be supported,
- report safeguarding concerns promptly in accordance with this Policy,
- participate in any inquiries or investigations into safeguarding concerns and adhere to confidentiality requirements,
- complete safeguarding training as required by ACOLA, and
- comply with ACOLA's Privacy Policy when handling personal or sensitive information connected with a safeguarding matter.

Individuals who speak up about or report safeguarding concerns in good faith:

- make a valuable contribution to the safety and wellbeing of everyone connected with ACOLA,
- support individuals who may be affected by harm, and
- help protect ACOLA's reputation as a trusted and responsible organisation.

Those in leadership positions are expected to identify, address and educate conduct that enables or condones behaviour that poses a safeguarding risk.

Additional Expectations for Specific Groups

ACOLA Officials

Board members, committee members, and officers are expected to:

- ensure adequate resources are allocated to safeguarding and that this Policy is reviewed and kept current,
- receive regular reports on safeguarding incidents, trends and training compliance,
- ensure Responsible Persons understand and discharge their duties under ACNC Governance Standard 5, and
- be willing to use their standing as ACOLA Officials to ensure that this Policy is upheld by others, including by intervening where a safeguarding concern arises in connection with ACOLA activities.

ACOLA Employees, Contributors and Participants

Staff, expert/reference group and steering committee members, expert contributors, stakeholders, contractors, volunteers, interns, speakers, representatives and other individuals engaged in ACOLA projects, activities and events are expected to:

- complete required safeguarding induction and refresher training,
- report safeguarding concerns to the Safeguarding Contact promptly in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure,
- cooperate fully with any safeguarding investigation, and
- protect the confidentiality of information acquired in connection with a safeguarding matter, consistent with ACOLA's Privacy Policy.

Prevention

Recruitment and screening

ACOLA will take reasonable steps to prevent unsuitable persons from working with or on behalf of the organisation, including:

- conducting reference checks for all staff and volunteers in roles involving contact with vulnerable persons,
- requiring Working with Vulnerable People registration (ACT) or equivalent checks in other jurisdictions where mandated,
- conducting police checks for roles assessed as higher risk, and
- incorporating safeguarding expectations into position descriptions, contracts and volunteer agreements.

Induction and training

All personnel will be made aware of this Policy and their safeguarding responsibilities as part of their induction. The nature and extent of any further safeguarding training will be commensurate with the person's role and assessed level of risk, with role-specific training provided before commencing work in any role involving contact with children or vulnerable persons.

Where safeguarding training is provided, refresher training will follow at least every two years or sooner following any significant incident or change in the regulatory framework. Training will cover recognising signs of abuse, neglect and exploitation; appropriate professional boundaries; responding to disclosures; reporting obligations; and the protection of personal information.

Risk assessment

ACOLA will conduct safeguarding risk assessments for new programs, services or activities involving contact with vulnerable persons; events involving children or young people; online engagement and digital platforms; and partnerships with external organisations. Risk assessments will be documented and reviewed periodically.

Third parties and partner organisations

Where ACOLA engages partner organisations, contractors or service providers to deliver activities on its behalf, ACOLA will assess their safeguarding practices as part of due diligence, include safeguarding obligations in relevant contracts and agreements and monitor compliance on an ongoing basis.

Safeguarding Contact

ACOLA designates a Safeguarding Contact responsible for receiving safeguarding concerns and coordinating ACOLA's response in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure.

Safeguarding Contact: Diana Melham, Company Secretary

- Email: confidential@acola.org.au
- Post: GPO Box 783 CANBERRA ACT 2601 (marked 'CONFIDENTIAL')
- Phone: +61 0412 605 129

Where the Safeguarding Contact is the subject of a concern, reports should be made directly to the CEO or Board Chair.

Reporting Safeguarding Concerns

Any person, including staff, volunteers, Board members, participants, or members of the public, may report a safeguarding concern to ACOLA. Reports may be made anonymously.

ACOLA will take all reports seriously regardless of whether the reporter identifies themselves.

Where a concern involves an immediate risk to a person's safety, the person who becomes aware of the concern must contact emergency services (000) immediately, before making an internal report.

Safeguarding concerns should be reported to the Safeguarding Contact using the contact details above. All concerns will be received, assessed, investigated and resolved in accordance with the Complaints Handling Policy and Procedure, which sets out ACOLA's procedures for acknowledgement, assessment, investigation, mandatory and external reporting obligations, outcomes and record keeping.

Confidentiality and privacy

All safeguarding concerns will be handled with strict confidentiality. Information will only be disclosed to those who need it to manage the concern or comply with legal obligations. The handling of personal information is governed by ACOLA's Privacy Policy and the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth).

Support for affected persons

ACOLA will ensure that persons who have experienced or reported a safeguarding concern have access to appropriate support, including information about internal and external support services and referral to professional counselling or support agencies where appropriate.

Whistleblower protections

Any person who reports a safeguarding concern in good faith is protected from retaliation under this Policy and, where applicable, under ACOLA's Whistleblower Policy and Part 9.4AAA of the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth).

Breaches of this Policy

Breaches of this Policy will be taken seriously and may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment or engagement. Where a breach involves criminal conduct, ACOLA will report the matter to the relevant authorities.

Legislative and Regulatory Framework

This Policy is informed by:

- *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cth)
- ACNC Governance Standards (in particular Governance Standards 1, 2, and 5)
- *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and the Australian Privacy Principles
- *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth), including whistleblower protections under Part 9.4AAA
- Applicable state and territory child safety and reportable conduct legislation, including Working with Vulnerable People registration requirements in the ACT and equivalent schemes in other jurisdictions where ACOLA operates
- ACNC Regulatory Focus (current edition)

ACOLA will monitor changes to this framework and update this policy accordingly.

Review

This Policy will be reviewed every two years, or sooner in the event of a serious safeguarding incident, a significant change in applicable law or a material change to ACOLA's activities.

The Board is responsible for approving amendments to this Policy.

Availability

The current version of this Policy is:

- published on ACOLA's website at [Policies | ACOLA](#)
- provided to new Board members, employees and key volunteers at induction
- available internally via relevant ACOLA SharePoint sites, and
- can be provided in hard copy on request from the Safeguarding Contact at confidential@acola.org.au or Company Secretary at company.secretary@acola.org.au.

Version Control

<i>ACOLA Governance Policy</i>					
Version	Reviewed by	Date	Approved by	Date	Next Review
V1.2026	ARF Committee	15.06.26	ACOLA Board	01.07.26	01.07.28